

Book Reviews

Amara Soonthorndhada¹ and Kerry Richter²

Tragic Orphans: Indians in Malaysia by Carl Vadivella Belle (2014) is truly unique and innovative, both in the way it brings together evidence from a historical point of view to its sensitive political landscape. The author contributes a highly comprehensive analysis of the slave trade phenomenon rooted in the 18th century, when the British Empire took a leading role in the rubber plantation scheme. The author describes how the destiny of indentured labor concerns, ethnic political tension and labor union transformation were led by charismatic Indian leaders.

In a skillfully crafted book, the author has brought together the diverse insights of an outstanding collection of historical, political and economic approaches in Malaysia, a multi-cultural, timeless, rigid and hierarchical society. Events in both political and social change over the British Empire's occupation of Malaysia are clearly described, along with the leaders who shaped how the events relied on political alliances such as the Foundation of Malayan Indian Congress. The interesting analysis describes how Malaysia after independence is dealing with more challenges and unsolved issues such as language, citizenship, education, culture, religion, and unemployment. The ethnic tensions within Peninsular Malaysia, the stateless Indian children without educational opportunity, and the temple demolition in 2000, causing grief and distress among Hindu Malaysians, still played a crucial role.

This book provides up-to-date insight into 'political engineering' under the current Prime Minister Najib, who tried hard to improve the relationship with the Indian Government and show good will with Indian Political Movements by appointing six Indians to his cabinet.

This important new work offers a brilliant analysis of historical and national political policy in the midst of a rapidly changing political, cultural and social landscape to build a more inclusive Malaysia. This book deserves to be a must-read for all.

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Sueo Sudo, the author of *Japan's ASEAN policy: In search of proactive multilateralism* (2014), spent three years to produce a skillfully crafted book. It brings together the diverse insights of an outstanding collection of Japan's foreign policies under an analytical framework related to ideas, institutions and proactive multilateralism. Sudo describes the change in foreign policy from a traditional bilateral economic stance to multilateral policies towards ASEAN. His research delineates how Japan and ASEAN collaboration after ASEAN at 50 needs a multi-sector response through political, economic and cultural pillars.

Major issues for consolidating Japan-ASEAN relations attempted by Japanese prime ministers in different regimes and at different difficult times within ASEAN are carefully analyzed with an emphasis that Japan should play multilateral politics. The conflict of interest, existing not only directly through Japan's strong economic sanctions but also throughout the political crisis in Cambodia, is one of the excellent points that the author included in the analysis. Comprehensive observations based on the proactive multilateral mechanism are investigated in greater detail, especially the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and the momentum towards East Asian regionalism with caution of the rise of China.

This book not only informs us of the change in foreign policy by the Japanese government starting from the Fukuda Doctrine Phase to the Hashimoto Doctrine for policy reforms, but provides us with powerful, practical lessons drawn from the insightful research framework and the well-presented ideas, institutions and proactive multilateralism.

Amara Soonthorndhada

In her book *Bureaucracy and development: Reflections from the Indonesian water sector* (2015), Diana Suhardiman uses the transfer of irrigation systems management from the central government to local associations as an example of how bureaucratic reform, even with ostensibly well-meaning intentions, can fail without reform of underlying structures. She maintains that the government reforms following the fall of the New Order government in Indonesia in 1998 did not attempt to re-structure the tangled bureaucratic mechanisms in place. The new government's continued reliance on international donors helped to sustain bureaucratic institutions, including top-down development strategies and existing political connections. In the irrigation sector, regional development efforts continued to be managed by the central government through a project-based model to administer World Bank funds. While government reforms included enacting regional autonomy, giving districts the power

to formulate and enact their own programs, resources for these programs were still under the central government's authority. The maintenance of the project development approach served existing corrupt practices – the very practices that reform was supposed to address. The book uses this thesis as the basis of the struggle for Irrigation Management Transfer: specifically, the “antagonistic relationship between IMT policy and the very agency responsible for its implementation” (p.78). Much of the impetus to transfer government irrigation projects to local water users' associations from the chief irrigation agency (the Ministry of Public Works) came from international donors and policy-makers. At the national level, the agency resisted even while formally accepting reform. Suhardiman presents a detailed analysis of how this power structure ultimately caused the failure of IMT at the local level, using many examples of how the policy's enactment broke down, with bureaucratic interests holding priority rather than farmers' needs.

The book does an excellent job at proving its central thesis by analyzing the power relationships, bureaucratic structures and myriad decisions that characterized the struggle for water sector reform in Indonesia. However, the writing style is that of a dedicated “policy wonk” and it's certainly not light reading. The most interesting part of the book is the chapter where Suhardiman describes what happened in one district, using qualitative evidence from stakeholders to enrich the narrative. Readers would do well to study how she diligently constructs her argument, as it is a detailed and well-thought out case study of how development fails.

Books reviewed:

- Belle, C. V. (2014). *Tragic orphans: Indians in Malaysia* (Vol. 496). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Sudo, S. (2014). *Japan's ASEAN policy: In search of proactive multilateralism* (Vol. 495). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Suwardiman, D. (2015). *Bureaucracy and development: Reflections from the Indonesian water sector* (Vol. 482). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.